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ABSTRACT

This paper identifies problems in Native American teacher training and suggests solutions to improve the training. In New Mexico, ideal candidates for teacher licensure are a group of Native American teacher assistants who work with Native American students. Most lack the general education requirements for a bachelor's degree and must take extensive coursework. Although 29% of the teacher trainees at the College of Santa Fe are Native American, only 56% of these trainees are active during any given semester, compared to 78% and 77% for Hispanic and other ethnic groups, respectively. Factors that explain disruption in teacher training of Native Americans are: (1) poverty; (2) geographic isolation; (3) family commitments; (4) cultural conflicts; and (5) inadequate academic experience. To address these problems, the program contacts Pueblo councils to find candidates for teacher training. Efforts also continue to recruit Native American teacher assistants, by providing financial support for coursework through school districts and by offering core coursework at the same institution as that in which students do their teacher training. Native American students could be retained in the program by offering them a larger monthly stipend, more on-site courses, and on-site advising and tutoring. (KS)

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Recruiting and Retaining Native Americans in Teacher Education

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(This paper is a revised and expanded version of a presentation for the 19th Annual Conference of the National Association of Bilingual Education in Tucson, Arizona on April 24, 1990.)

Introduction

An important strategy in the education of language minority children is the employment of language minority teachers. This requires a focus on the teacher certification process. This paper presents an overview of the Native American component of a federally-funded teacher training program. (The observations expressed here are those of the director of the program, also its primary recruiter.) The program serves a section of the Rio Grande basin in Central New Mexico, an area with relatively large numbers of Native Americans, particularly Pueblos and Navajos. Much of the coursework and all of the practicums and student teaching are done on-site in rural schools with high proportions of Native American children. The program pays the tuition, fees, and books of the all the teacher trainees; some of their transportation costs; and a small stipend to full-time trainees.

This paper concentrates on problematic aspects of Native American teacher training and suggested solutions. This does not mean there have been no successes. Rather, the intention is to point out difficulties encountered by Native Americans during teacher training which are different in either degree or kind from those encountered by other ethnic groups. These difficulties are a hindrance for Native Americans to enter into and complete degree, licensure and endorsement programs.

Also, in thinking about Native Americans, it is important to keep in mind the differences among these varied peoples. In particular, Navajos and Pueblos constitute populations with very different linguistic, geographic and historical backgrounds. Such differences which impinge on recruitment and retention in teacher training will be explored.

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Recruiting

Even though Native Americans represent a higher percentage of the population in NM than they do in any other state, their numbers are still small relative to the rest of the population. They constitute only about 5% of the population within the area served by the teacher training program reported on here.

On the other hand, in each of approximately a dozen schools in this area, there is a group of Native American teacher assistants working with Native American students. These teacher assistants are ideal candidates for teacher licensure (elementary and secondary), since they have a proven commitment to education and valuable classroom experience working with Native American children. Unfortunately, most do not meet eligibility requirements for entry into the licensure program: 1) completion of the lower division "core" (a.k.a., general education) courses which include science, math, social sciences, writing and literature; and 2) a passing score on a standardized test of general knowledge and communication skills.

Native American teacher assistants contacted as candidates for recruitment into this program are usually far from having completed the general education requirements for a bachelor's degree. This is true despite the fact that many have completed large amounts of college or university credit. Most of their courses are through departments of curriculum and instruction, that is courses in teaching methods, and get them no closer to completing the lower division core (math, science, writing, etc.) needed for entering a licensure program.

This is not meant to deny the value of the coursework that is generally offered and taken. The coursework is provided on-site in rural areas where many of these Native American teaching assistants are serving Native American children. By making such coursework available, the colleges and universities provide an undeniable service, and taking and finishing such coursework constitutes a real accomplishment for the students.

However, while the teaching methods coursework is helpful to teaching assistants in their work as teacher assistants, it can not alone lead to a bachelor's degrees. Effectively, by taking only methods courses, the teaching assistants are locked into a vocational track.

Of course, it may be argued that this teaching methods courses make the paraprofessionals more effective in the classroom. But the same argument could be made of core courses in math, science, writing, etc., perhaps more so.

Moreover, satisfactory completion of these core courses is essential to success on standardized tests.

In New Mexico, candidates for licensure must take standardized tests of general knowledge and communication skills. National statistics show that minorities of all kinds, Native Americans included, make a poor showing on such tests. The results of the standardized test screening of minorities in our program bears this out: Native Americans are the most likely of the ethnic groups in our program to fail this testing.

These problems are rooted in the educational system for Native Americans K-12. The New Mexico Indian Education Task Force in proposing a framework for restructuring Indian Education in 1988 said:

> A clear consensus of agreement emerged reflecting the scholastic problems of Indian students including low test scores, high dropout rates, frequent absenteeism, high sucicide rates and poor performance at advanced studies.

This scenario both explains the lack of Native Americans eligible for teacher training and argues most eloquently for the training of highly qualified Native Americans for the education of Native American children.

Recent years have seen notable increases in Native American elementary teachers. The number of Native American secondary teachers remains very low. It is therefore unfortunate that practically none of the qualified Native Americans candidates for our program seek secondary licensure. Those Native Americans that have entered our program only for endorsement in bilingual education (those already possessing licensure) have all been elementary teachers. This upgrade of Native American elementary teachers does not confront the lack of Native Americans in the secondary "content" areas. The strongest Native American candidates for secondary licensure have been those with BA's in content areas (e.g., business administration) before entering our program.

In addition to academic factors outlined above, other factors militate against the recruitment of Native Americans into teacher training. Economic, geographic, social and cultural factors discussed below that influence retention also have a negative impact on recruitment. Yet a strong recruiting effort among Native Americans has born fruit. In a program that has openings for about fifty-five trainees at any given time, the average number and percentage of those trainees by ethnicity over four semesters in 1989 and 1990 was the following:

Table 1

Number and Percentage of Trainees
in Program By Ethnicity

Ethnicity of Trainees	Number of Trainees	Percentage of Trainees
Native American	16	29%
Hispanic	27	48%
Other	13	23%

Note: "Other" consists of African-American and Anglo trainees.

Retaining (and Graduating) Native Americans

The fact that one is admitted to a teacher training program does not mean the battle is over. Far from it. Teacher training is an arduous process which requires much of the trainee. Native Americans in our program have been especially prone to interruptions in the process leading to licensure. The following data strongly suggest that such interruptions are associated with permanent withdrawl of an unacceptably high proportion of Native Americans from the program.

Table 2

Academic Status of Teacher Trainees
Over Four Semesters Spring '89 - Sum '90
(Percentages)

	Academic Status			
Ethnicity	Active	No Courses Available	Inactive	Dropped from Program
Native Amer (N=16)	56%	6%	26%	12%
Hispanic (N=27)	78%	11%	7%	4%
Other (N=13)	77%	15%	8%	0%

What These Percentages Tell Us

The first column indicates what percentage of the trainees in the three ethnic groups (in a given semester) made progress toward licensure (elementary or secondary) and/or

endorsement (bilingual and ESL), the second column what percentage could make no progress toward licensure and/or endorsement because none of the required courses were available to them during a given semester, the third column the percentage that decided against taking courses (even though courses were available), and the fourth column what percentage dropped from the program.

What we see in this table is that in any given semester Native American trainees are more prone to temporary or permanent disruptions in the teacher training process. As the second column indicates, required coursework is more likely to be available to the Native American trainees than to the other ethnic groups. Yet, other kinds of disruptions (third and fourth columns) occur among Native Americans at a rate more than three times that of other ethnic groups in the program. More than one-fourth (26%) of the Native Americans in a given semester choose to not take courses even though courses are available; almost one-eighth (12%) drop from the program each semester.

Factors Which Explain Disruptions in Teacher Training of Native Americans

Why should the Native American trainees experience so much more disruption in the teacher education process? Here are some possible contributing factors.

1. Poverty - Though our program subsidizes the direct costs of the teacher training (tuition, books and fees), incidental costs such as baby-sitting and transportation are not covered except for full-time students. Though part time students from other ethnicities are in much the same position, their situation is probably on the average less precarious. Unemployment rates among Native Americans are so high so that those with jobs (e.g., teacher assistants) are depended upon by their families even more than among other ethnic groups. Even relatively modest incidental costs due to teacher training may prove unbearable. Under the circumstances, dropping a full-time job as teacher assistant (even to a part-time status) to make more time for studying is often unthinkable, even though ultimately it would mean better pay. Permanent economic hardship brings with it very high rates of poor health, dysfunctional family relations, alcoholism and suicide. Such conditions make education very difficult.

2. Geographical Isolation - Most Native American trainees live in rural settings at some distance from where classes are held. This problem is especially pronounced for Navajos in our program who come to class from as many as 100 miles away. This travel creates not only economic costs but physical and emotional hardship as well.

3. Family Commitments - The majority of Native American trainees are women (having more to do with gender in education, in particular elementary education, than with ethnicity). Many are mothers, often single mothers. As with transportation, paid child care is usually unaffordable. "Free" child care by older siblings or others within the immediate or extended family is part of a complex of obligations that will as often conflict with regular course attendance as it does promote it.

4. Cultural Conflicts - The relations of dominant to Native American cultures have been repressive. Cultural repression and economic marginalization have gone hand in hand. The Pueblos and Navajos served by the program have been some of the most successful among all Native Americans in maintaining their linguistic and cultural identity in the face of this repression. Not surprisingly, this sometimes puts the goals of a mainstream educational program (such as ours) into conflict with tribal obligations associated with maintaining tribal affiliation and identity. For example, the traditional rituals of the Pueblos (of agriculture and the hunt) may take place during class time.

5. Academic Experience - Culture influences not only time frames, but frames of mind as well. Our literacy-based, teacher-centered classrooms depart radically from the traditional learning contexts of the Pueblos and Navajos. This undoubtedly helps determine the differential success rate of Native Americans and other cultural groups in our program. Many of the Native American trainees in the program are first generation college students. This fact influences subtly, but profoundly, the academic expectations that these students have for themselves and that their teachers have of them. This affects the quality of their education all through school but especially in the secondary grades, and consequently their chances of success once they arrive in college.

These circumstances act as roadblocks to the progress of the Native American trainees in our teacher education program. This would not be so bad if the roadblocks presented no more than temporary detours. If Native Americans eventually graduated, the difficulties would perhaps be acceptable. Unfortunately, very low graduation rates of Native Americans as compared to other ethnic groups in the program indicate that the obstacles knock out all but a few of those who start the training. The following table shows graduation rates of trainees over the course of four semesters (Spring '89 - Summer '90).

Table 3

Graduation Rates of Teacher Trainees

	Num in Program	% in Program	Number Grads	Graduation Rate
Nat Amer	16	29	4	25
Hispanic	27	48	15	56
Other	13	23	12	92

For all practical purposes, the graduation rate is the survival rate, and a survival rate of only 25% is unacceptable. What then can be done to raise the odds of survival of Native Americans in our teacher training program?

Possible Solutions

Recruitment

This component of our program is slowly becoming more community-based and longer range in its approach. Until recently, all recruiting was done in the schools where there are Native American teacher assistants. Lately, contacts have been made among Pueblo councils in an effort to find new candidates for the program and to encourage community support of those already in the program. Also, instead of focussing the recruiting effort only on finding those who are already eligible for the program, regular contacts are maintained with promising Native American candidates still short of requisite coursework to encourage their steady progress toward eligibily.

One method of recruitment now under consideration is to provide a steady flow of eligible Native Americans into the teacher training program through a "feeder" program of Native American teacher assistants. Such an approach would have the teacher assistants take their core coursework (lower division coursework required for entrance to teacher education program) at the same institution where they will be doing their teacher training. This will promote the closest possible contact between promising candidates and those directing the teacher training program. Under the proposal, school districts where the teacher assistants are employed would pay for their coursework out of federal and state funds. This would allow the kind of collaboration of local educational agencies and institutions of higher education now being promoted by OBEMLA (the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs).

Retention

1. More Money - Some of the problems are simply economic. Larger stipends (currently $175/month), more funds for costs of student transportation, and funds for child care are straightforward responses to the most common financial burdens of the training process. The amount of money available for these items in our budget has been inadequate. Putting additional money into unavoidable indirect costs of teacher education is necessary to make the expenditure of funds on tuition, fees and books more efficacious.

2. More On-site Courses - Rather than bring students to the teacher, the teacher could go to the students. This solution is only possible, however, if there are enough students for the classes to "make". The Native American trainees are usually widely spread in sparsely populated areas. Though quite a few satellite courses have been made available until now, the possibilities have been limited by not pooling resources and trainees in a systematic fashion.

3. On-site Advising and Tutoring - Until now, counseling and tutoring have not been available at the satellite campus where teacher education classes for the program are taught nor at rural sites where many of the Native American trainees live and work. Under a cooperative arrangement to begin soon, a team of specialists (from the main campus) in developmental reading, writing and math will make regular visits to these locations. They will monitor and promote the coursework of Native Americans in both the feeder and teacher education classes. They will also provide training sessions for the entrance tests to the teacher education program.

Conclusion

Some of the solutions to recruitment and retention of Native Americans in any teacher education program lie outside the program itself. The underlying problems for Native Americans in this teacher training program are broadly based. Until far-reaching issues of educational, economic, social and cultural equity for Native Americans are addressed, the search for local solutions to the issue of teacher training will be frustrating. Yet local education programs (like ours) by and for Native Americans will continue to be both a litmus and engine of overall progress.

Despite their disenchantment with the educational processes of mainstream society, practically all Native Americans I know believe that some form of institutionalized schooling is essential for their individual and collective survival.

Most feel that Native American control of that educational process through teaching by Native American teachers is essential. Federal support of Native American teacher training programs encourages this input. Hopefully, this paper has provided practical ideas on how to increase the effectiveness of funding for these programs.